



TITLE:

Introduction

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CITATION:

THAN, TUN. Introduction. THE ROYAL ORDERS OF BURMA, A.D. 1598-1885 1988, 8: [7]-[11]

ISSUE DATE:

1988

URL:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2433/173895>

RIGHT:

Introduction

On ascension to the throne a Burmese king in his first proclamation would invariably say that he wanted to promote and extend Buddhism and he would in the course of this endeavour destroy all enemies of the Buddha's Religion. Everything he did, even a war with a neighbouring country, had according to him had a religious significance. With the propaganda that he had a religious duty to suppress heresy he succeeded in rallying his subjects to his fighting forces. His war, for instance with Thailand, became a holy war. Srilanka had an Amarapura sect of Buddhist monks (ROB 8 March 1841). Why not Thailand? His overtures to have an offensive and defensive alliance with Yun Gyi - Cochin China (Vietnam), was for an expressed intention to make Buddhism prosper there as it prospered in Burma (ROB 25 April 1822, ROB 5 September 1824 and ROB 22 November 1824). Actually he wanted the Cochin Chinese help him to destroy the power of Thailand. But Cochin Chinese interest in Burma was, it seems, to obtain the esculent birds' nest from islands off the coast of Tennasserim and its king was not convinced that a country so far away like Burma could be of any use to their land (see ROB V Introduction, xvii-xxii). Buddhism had its origin in India. A report (dated 21 January 1823) from his agents that he sent to central India (Majjhimadesa) explained that it was the revival of Brahmanism that occurred after the death of King Asoka that put an end to Buddhism in India. After Brahmanism there were Mohammedanism and Christianity. Now it was his duty to reestablish or revive Buddhism in India too (ROB 31 August 1824). To realize these aims he needed strong alliances. China could not have much interest with problems of Burma with English because they had had their own problems with these people at that time. They only wanted to keep friendship without any commitment to help each other against a powerful enemy (ROB 19 April 1833). It was true that many Indian princes were anti-English (ROB 6 August 1824) but none of them were strong enough to help him when he marched his army himself, as he said he would, to conquer all India (ROB 11 December 1825). In the beginning of the war he considered it simply as a local concern (ROB 4 June 1825) but he soon realized that he was wrong and so he decided to muster all available forces including the forces recalled from other phases of war. In this part eight of the *Royal Orders of Burma*, one would find several records that explain how the Burmese fought against the invaders from the sea once in 1824-1826 and again in 1852. The documents on

relations with Yun Gyi - Cochin Chinese, are also interesting as they give in some detail the conditions in Burma told to impress a would-be alliance.

The first war with the English (1824-1826) was terminated by the Treaty of Yandabo (signed on 24 February 1826) and it was followed by a Commercial Treaty (of 23 November 1826). We are fortunate to get some relevant documents (Ai Ya MSS, Daze, now with Ye-U U Thaung) as follows :

Negotiations to conclude peace dated 16 February 1826, 23 February 1826 and 23 February 1836;

Treaty of Yandabo signed on 24 February 1826;

Return of Enemy Property : Henry Gouger, 4 March 1826, 8 March 1826 and Adoniram Judson, 4 March 1826;

Conferring Burmese Titles on English Officers, 14 May 1826;

Release of Slaves taken during wars in Assam (Ahthan), Cachar (Akkabut), Jainta (Way Tha Li), Manipur, etc., 8 June 1827;

Settling Boundary Demarcations, 8 June 1827;

Commercial Treaty signed on 23 November 1826;

Lists of Customs collected in Rangoon dated 8 March 1827 and 21 August 1827;

Payment of War Indemnity in four instalments : Documents dated 19 April 1826, 14 May 1826, 27 May 1826, 21 September 1826, 6 June 1827, 14 July 1828, 8 August 1828, 14 January 1832, 19 January 1832, 27 October 1832 and 27 October 1832;

and Excess of Payment (Rs 14,094) repaid on 25 July 1833.

The problem was that the Burmese had great difficulty to raise funds to pay the indemnity because the land was devastated by war and to give the silver to the English because they maintained that the Burmese tried to pay less by bringing silver of inferior quality. This was, however, not strictly correct because finally the English had to return Sicca Rupees 14,094 that they had taken in excess (see document dated 25 July 1833). The commercial treaty said that only the usual customs would be paid in Rangoon port though we did not know what were the usual dues until now that they are given in the documents mentioned above.

Article eleven of Treaty of Yandabo required the Burmese to release all war captives (taken from the English allies, viz. Assam, Cachar, Jainta and Mainpur). The Burmese readily agreed to do this provided the so-called prisoners wanted to return to their native places. In another words they should be allowed to stay in Burma if they chose to do so by their own free will (Document dated 8 June

1827) When Lieut. Rawlinson arrived in Ava on 22 February 1828, he did not find anyone of the said prisoners who wanted to go back to their native places. Usually the Burmese policy was to treat well these foreigners. They would be grouped by their profession and given Nay Myay - Land to build their homes, and Loke Myay - Land to cultivate. An appendix to a document (dated 25 April 1837) gives where these foreigners were living in villages east of the Mu river that joins the Irrawaddy before the Chidwin does.

Natives and Foreigners in Villages east of the Mu river, 1783

Village	Natives	Foreigners	Total
Ai Paung Gyaung	46	45	91 Aung
Chan Tha	50	23	73
Hna Ma Za Yit	16	29	45
Ka Lon			
Khin Lat	21	15	36
Kin Ba Yit			
Kya	12	132	144
Kyaung Thin	10	31	41 Leik
Chin	243	29	273
Ma Ok	97	24	121
Mauk Ban	5	27	32
Mo Gaung	4	6	10
Mon Hla	126	124	250
Mon Taung Gyi	51	66	117
Mon Taung Hla	12	37	49
Mu Tha	165	37	202
Mya Gan			
Myin (North)	31	22	53
Myin (South)	8		8
Myin Kya Ma Ji Thut	54	32	86
Myin Zi (North)	42	4	46
Myo Hla Zi Byu Gon	80	63	143
Myo Thit Gyi	26	131	157
Nga Yon Kyay		30	30
Nga Zin Ywa	4	3	7
Myaung Bin Tha	7	27	34
Pan Da Zeik	12	33	45

Pa Yan	26	127	153
Shin Min Htwe			
Shut Ti (now in ruins)	10	2	12
Shwe Gu			
Sin In	76	68	144
Sit Lyin	1	1	2
Tha Byay Bin Min Ywa		23	23
Tha Lon (North)	24	1	25
Tha Lon (South)	29	11	40
Tha Wut Thi	167	246	413
Wun Zi		21	21
Yin Daik	199	184	383
Yu Daw Mu	13	205	218
40 Villages	1667	1859	3526

In the forty villages of the above list, there were a total of 3,526 people (1,667 natives + 1,859 foreigners). The natives formed only 47.3 per cent of the population. The foreigners were, moreover, professionals and therefore they would be treated well. It therefore supports one theory that they did not want to return to their native places. Among the natives, the policy was different. The free movement of people from one locality to another or from one group to another was always discouraged. It was not unusual that people fled from one place to take refuge in another during draught, famine, flood or war. But officers always tried to bring back the refugees to their native places when the calamities were over (ROB 16 September 1819 and ROB 25 August 1850).

In religion there was the restoration of the old order. King Badon 1783-1819 went to the one extreme that in the practice of Buddhism he wanted to follow only what the scriptures prescribed. For instance a man who renounced the world to become a Buddhist monk was virtually a mendicant and he needed no one's permission to do that. Therefore the ordination service which had been considered so far as very essential was not really necessary. As regards *si/a* i.e. a promise not to steal, kill, etc. it was strictly a matter of self discipline and it was not really important for a person to appear before a monk to 'ask *si/a*' and no monk could honestly 'give *si/a*' to any one. So he forbade a candidate to monkhood to undergo the usual ordination rites or a man to go and ask from a monk the *si/a*. After King Badon, his reforms were very quickly forgotten and the old order set in. A Supreme Leader of Propagation and Extension of the

Buddha's Religion was appointed to take care of all religious affairs and his major concern was to check any laxity in the observation of the Vinaya in every monks daily life. By his report, a monk found to be careless in the observation of the Vinaya would be punished by the order of the king. That was commonly understood as the Dama Set - Decision with reference to the Vinaya by the Supreme Leader of the Religion, (ROB 12 June 1823) and Ana Set - Punishment by the King. The Pon Daw Pyet Ga Dain - New Calendar, of King Badon 1783-1819 was ignored and the king appointed a calendar committee to make a calendar year by year by using the old methods of calculation (ROB 19 April 1837 and ROB 5 November 1839). The only thing that his successors took from King Badon was his system of religious examinations (ROB 3 June 1833) and the curriculum that he prescribed for them (ROB 27 May 1836). In customary law we noticed one important change. Formerly when a person died with no direct heirs, his or her property was escheated to the crown. Now a nearest relative shall get it or even if such a person was not available, a person who took care of the deceased before he or she died would inherit the estate (ROB 25 April 1837 and 28 April 1837) and therefore the Amway Wun - Officer of Inheritance, was dismissed and the Amway Taik - House of Escheated Property, became part of Treasury.

Kings spent more time on building religious monuments and having numerous semi-religious ceremonies like pagoda festivals, conferring titles to monks, etc. There were reorganization of fighting forces but they were just updating the register of armed men. There were conspiracies against the life of the king and all of them were mercilessly eliminated. These were the signs of deterioration and degeneration and with or without the aggression of the English the fall of the dynasty was near.